

Children's Scrutiny Panel

10th March 2021

Meeting commenced: 6.00pm

Meeting ended: 7:15pm

Present:

Councillor Brocklehurst (in the chair)

Councillors:

Joshua Brooks, Jillian Collinson, Laura Edwards, Ari Leitner, Lewis Nelson, Mike Pevitt, Neil Reynolds, Madeline Wade, Joan Walsh, Ronnie Wilson.

Co-opted Members:

Dr Keith Archer, Jacqui Morrissey, Judith Elderkin.

Also, in attendance:

Councillor John Walsh (Executive Support Member for Children's and Young People's Services).

Officers:

Sayma Khan – Head of Service, Innovation and Transformation

Chris Mee – Strategic Finance Manager

Charlotte Ramsden – Strategic Director People

Cathy Starbuck – Assistant Director Education and Skills

Rebekah Tucker – Head of the Looked after Children's Service

Liz Wright – Democratic Services (Clerk)

Members of the public:

- One
- Streamed as an audio meeting via Microsoft Team via [Watch Live Council Meetings](#) page on the city council website.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Collette Weir.

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting

Resolved: That, the minutes of the meeting held on 10.02.20 were approved as a correct record.

4. Matters arising from the minutes

There were no matters arising.

5. Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) Update

The Head of Service, Innovation and Transformation (Sayma Khan) had been the interim Head of Service for Looked After Children (LAC), whilst the post was recruited to and she introduced the update and highlighted the following.

- The update covered the period of October 2020 to the end of November 2020.
- The panel met monthly to discuss issues related to the care and wellbeing of Looked After Children (LAC) and care leavers and included reports and data from officers and Regulation 44 visits to the children's residential care homes.
- The composition of the panel was highlighted and the lead officer for the panel was the Service Manager for LAC and the new manager Rebekah Tucker was introduced to the panel.
- The October Meeting:
 - The report from the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) was presented at the meeting, giving a detailed insight into the work of children's social services.
 - It had been agreed at the meeting that a letter would be sent to all the care homes thanking everyone for all their hard work during the pandemic.
- The November Meeting:
 - The focus had been on fostering and the end of Year Fostering Report had been presented. Work was ongoing at a Greater Manchester (GM) to improve the recruitment and retention of foster carers.
 - There had been a focus in Salford on encouraging staff to become foster carers. It was reported that two staff in Route 29 were currently going through the process to be foster carers.
 - At the beginning of pandemic foster carers had received an extra £10 per week.
 - Route 29 now had four supported flats as part of the offer to support transition. There had been an Ofsted monitoring visit and the feedback had been very positive.
 - Devonshire Road care home had had an assurance visit and it was confirmed as fully compliant.
 - Barton Moss Secure Unit had received support from Public Health to manage Covid19 cases.
- The support from elected members was very good for the CPP.

The Chair invited questions and comments from the members.

- A member proposed a policy forum type meeting for CPP for all elected members and for the induction of the new members following the May election. The members supported the proposal and the clerk would raise it with Members Services.
- A member commented that the turnover of foster carers (FCs) was a concern. The complexity of the process to become a FC could be a barrier to many potential FCs and it was confirmed that this was being raised at GM level.
- The Chair of the CPP commended the proposed policy forum and praised Route 29 and the use of Lledr Hall. It was confirmed that funding had been secure to update the accommodation at Lledr Hall and it was scheduled to be back in use for Route 29 respite at the end of May.
- A member also commended the proposed policy forum and highlighted the importance of communicating to current and potential FCs including thanking the current FCs for all their work as well as marketing and myth busting for new FCs.
- A member asked about the Devonshire Road assurance visit and it was confirmed that the home was fully compliant and all impact risk assessments had been strengthened and many lessons had been learnt from Route 29. One manager was now in place over all the homes so that standards were consistently applied and best practice was shared across the homes.

The Chair thanked the The Head of Service, Innovation and Transformation for the report and thanked the CPP for the regular updates.

Resolved: That, the panel requested that a corporate parenting policy forum be held for existing and new elected members following the May elections.

6. Budget Monitoring Report

The Strategic Finance manager (Chris Mee) introduced the report and highlighted the following.

- The monitoring report was for the period from April 2020 to the end of December 2020.
- The core revenue budget for 2020/21 was £94.997m and the forecast expenditure for the year was £95.335m giving a forecast adverse variation of £0.338m for the financial year, excluding implications of Covid19.
- The integrated fund budget pressure was highlighted.
- There had been £2.2m reduction in the cost of children in placements.
- The cost of LAC was reducing year on year.
- The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) overspend had been £4m at the end of June and was now forecast to be £4.2m and due to the pressures on the High Needs Block. The number of pupils with Education Health Care Plans (EHCP) continued to increase and put pressure on the HNB.
- The overall deficit for the DSG would be £20m at the end of the year. There was £4.5m extra funding expected for the DSG HNB next year and a DfE consultation on the HNB was currently ongoing and the outcome could impact on the HNB in future years.
- Further work would be required to assess the cost impact of Covid19 on services in the short, medium and longer term.

The Chair invited questions and comments from members.

- A member asked for conformation for forecast for the DSG deficit at the end of the financial year and it was confirmed at £21m.
- A member asked about the Special Educational Needs transport issues and if they just related to transport to school or to other issues as well. It was confirmed that they referred to the costs of SEND transport to and from school and transport for those children placed outside of Salford and the cost of any escorts.
- A member asked if independent travel support was provided. It was confirmed that Independent Travel Trainers were provided as well for those young people leaving school as part of EHCPs as required.
- A member asked about the responsibility for the budget deficit for Harrop Fold School when it converted to become an academy and where that would be accounted for in the budget. It was confirmed that once the deficit had been agreed it was the responsibility of the city council, but it would fall outside of the DSG and would be provided for separately outside the budget.
- A member highlighted the national concern about the increasing pressures on the HNB and the lack of government funding to meet the actual needs and asked if representations were being made to Government to highlight the concerns. The Chair confirmed that the Overview and Scrutiny Board had suggested investigating the pressures on the Children's Services budget and the causes of increases in costs (such as the numbers of pupils with EHCPs increasing and the age range that the budget covered having widened to 0-25 years without the accompanying increase in funding) and also reviewing the cost of specialist services and if the appropriate budget was being set. It was also confirmed that the LA had contributed to previous consultations on the HNB and would receive extra funding this year and in the longer term under the new criteria for distribution of funding. There was also a new SEND consultation and the LA would contribute to both consultations.
- The Strategic Director People highlighted the Local Government Association (LGA) had reported on funding. She highlighted that in Salford the focus had been on *invest to save* that

had, for example, focused on developing Early Help and Route 29 and the report showed the impact of this approach reducing the pressures within the budget by working better and more effectively.

- A member commented that it was important to recognize the success of Route 29 supporting families and keeping children and young people in their homes. There were also extra places within Salford for children with autism and complex needs and reducing the need to send children outside of Salford to get appropriate support and being a more efficient use of resources.

*Councillor Pevitt left the meeting at this point.

- The Chair thanked the Strategic Finance Manager, The Assistant Director for Education and Skills and the Strategic Director for People for the very informative report.

Resolved: That, the members noted the report.

7. Work Programme and Membership

a. Membership

- Following the Chair's approach to SACRE for a Jewish community representative, Alex Klein, SACRE member had been identified as a nominee and he had confirmed he would be happy to join the panel.
- The Clerk confirmed that any nominee agreed by the panel would need to be approved by the Council. The Chair asked the panel members to confirm if they would approve Alex Klein as the nominee from the panel. The panel members approved the nomination unanimously.
- The clerk confirmed that the deadline for nominations for the two parent governor vacancies was 12th March. One nomination had been received so far.
- There were still vacancies for a free church representative and a representative from the Roman Catholic Diocese.

b. Work programme

- The DfE guidance for GCSEs, testing and assessment for 2021 was due out at Easter time and would be included in the briefing for the panel in April.
- Cathy Starbuck proposed bringing the Youth Service presentation to the April meeting to update the panel on the work of the service during the Covid19 pandemic. The presentation had been very well received at a recent Local Government Association (LGA) conference by other Local Authorities.

Resolved: That, the panel:

1. approved Alex Klein as the Jewish community representative nomination for approval by Council.
2. agreed to have the Youth Service presentation on the agenda for the April 2021 meeting.

7. Any Other business (AOB)

There were no items of AOB.

8. Date, time and business for next meeting

Wednesday 14th April 2021 at 6pm (5:30pm briefing for members).